

cinema department-- rebels with a cause

by Robert Lowe

In the film editing room, located in the basement of the Classroom Wing, Nicholas Ray, Visiting Professor of Cinema, is hunched over a viewer, scrutinizing the results of the day's shooting. It has been twenty-five years since he directed his first movie, *They Live By Night*, which deals with two outlaws. About that film, Department Chairman, Lawrence Gottheim said, "The best things in *Bonnie and Clyde* were imitations of it. It has a profound insight into America and will never go out of date." Since that time, Ray has directed Humphrey Bogart in *In a Lonely Place*, Joan Crawford in *Johnny Guitar*, and James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and is now working with approximately forty Harpur students on a University sponsored film, tentatively entitled, *Don't Expect Too Much*.

"Everybody involved, besides Ray, is a student doing the work of a professional film crew," one of the cameramen remarked. The movie has been shot, so far, entirely in and around the campus, and wherever crowds develop (registration, protest rallies, etc.), Ray and his crew are on the scene. Another special feature of the film is the technique employed: the material has been shot in different film gauges, Super 8, 16mm. and 35 mm., and will give the effect, in certain sections, of the images flowing into one another.

As to what exactly the film is about, Ray has refused to say. In fact, he has declined any sort of interview, and his crew, for the most part, is acting similarly. Part of the reason for this, according to Gottheim, is "The film is evolving all the time. There is no shooting script. It's the not-knowing that characterizes a work in progress."

The close student-professor relationship evident in the work being done on *Don't Expect Too Much* is typical of the Cinema Department, one of Harpur's newest. "The students are courageous. They are not being prepared for an easy future," Gottheim asserted. "It's not job-oriented. When it comes time to graduate, they'll be leaping into the abyss. They're dedicated to the department. There's no reason to stay here except out of a desperate dedication to cinema."

The first traces of a Cinema Department appeared at SUNY Binghamton in the Spring of 1969, when Gottheim taught a film course in the English Department. At that time, Ken Jacobs, an underground filmmaker and now Associate Professor of Cinema, was invited to give a seminar here, and was extremely well-received. A program in Cinema was instituted during the 1969-70 academic year, and Jacobs was hired. Gottheim had received a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant that year, so Jacobs taught the entire program. In 1970-71, Gottheim returned,

and the two of them developed the current scheme of courses. Ralph Hocking, Lecturer in Photography and Television, was added as an "irregular" member of the department. Previously, he had taught a no-credit workshop here, and next year will teach a photography course.

This year, Ray was added to the Cinema Department. As Gottheim pointed out, "We were independent underground filmmakers. We were looking for someone to complement our work. We called Nicholas Ray out of the blue, and he came here for a few days last Spring. While he was generally cynical about university film programs, he was impressed with us."

The growth of the Cinema Department in the last two years, has, however, been considerably slowed by the budget cuts. "At the time the department was established, there was almost a steady flow of funds," Gottheim recalled. "The very next year difficult times started. A number of things have been cut off by the state budget. The Administration wants to support the program, but they are stuck by limitations."

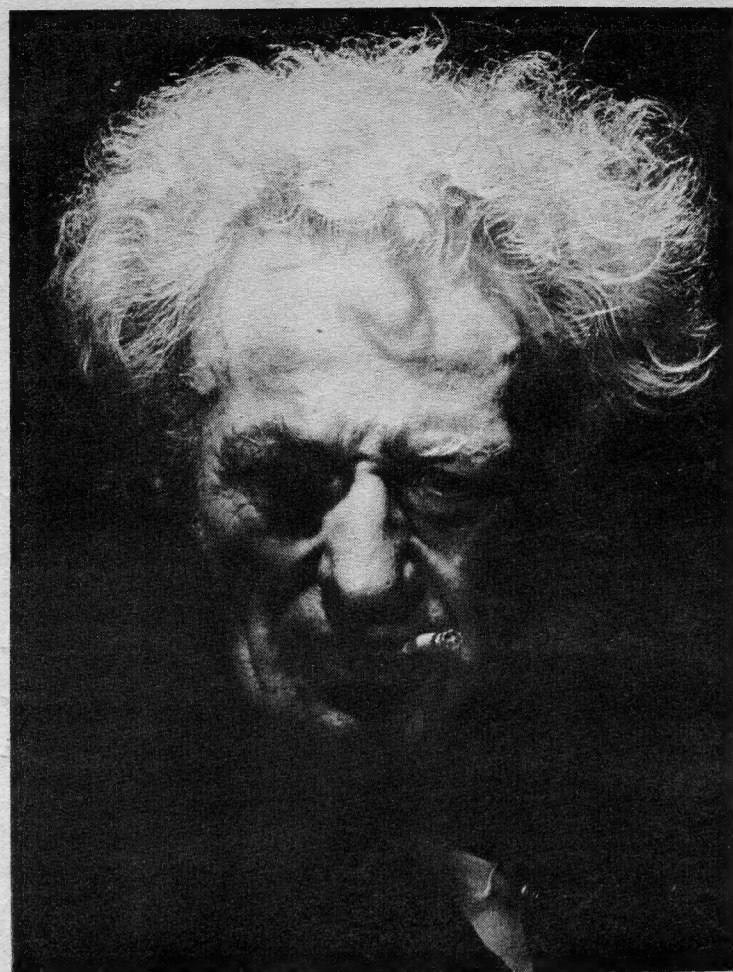
As a result of the cutbacks, there is a very strict system of pre-requisites for higher level courses, particularly those involving film production, and many students who desire Cinema courses are shut out. Gottheim termed this situation "cruel" but added, "Because of the lack of facilities and personnel, the number of students who could be admitted to production courses is tragically low compared to student interest."

This occurs despite the fact that all three members of the department teach much more than the usual professorial course load. "Next year, Gottheim anticipates, 'we will only be able to take fifteen or twenty new production students, although there are more than that number who want to get in.'"

Nevertheless, any student may take Cinema 101, which is given every fall semester and is a pre-requisite to taking any other Cinema courses. It meets three times a week, a three hour session each time, but has no reading assignments, no papers, no tests, no mid-term, and no final. The grading is based on a notebook each student keeps in which he records his observations of the various films seen.

The aim of the course, according to Gottheim, who will teach it next semester, is to "teach students to comprehend the possibilities of cinema as an art. People have seen an incredible number of movies and have definite ideas of what's a good film. Some films are good from a literary or dramatic point of view. We try to teach them what's good from a cinematic point of view." To accomplish this purpose, students are shown films which do not always fall into the traditional categories of those made in Hollywood and in foreign countries. "Everything is taken very seriously," Gottheim added.

Despite the harried atmosphere of the



Nicholas Ray

Cinema office, seriousness about films is one of the keynotes of the department. As its chairman points out, one of the reasons for this seriousness is that when the department was created, "there was a strong feeling among the rest of the faculty that cinema wasn't a proper academic discipline and that we would pander to the lowest interest of students. We discourage dilettantes. If we didn't maintain a high level of academic discipline, we would be flooded with students here for the wrong reasons."

This seriousness is apparently paying off. Gottheim asserted. "Here you can develop yourself as a serious film artist or an artistic thinker about films. So-called 'difficult' works can be shown here, and people here can appreciate them." Proof can be found in the upcoming University-wide Film Symposium, which will be held here next weekend, where the works of a number of independent filmmakers will be screened and discussed, and where the finished portion of Ray's film will be premiered.

photo by karen rubin

CINEMA SEMINAR

Saturday, April 29

12:00-1:30 Registration, Lobby of Lecture Hall 1.

1:30-5:30 Viewing and discussion of films by independent film artists:

Seeing With One's Own Eyes directed by Stan Brakhage; this film takes place entirely in the Pittsburgh morgue. Earlier films of Brakhage's, *Eyes* and *Deus Ex*, had their debuts here.

Serene Velocity directed by Ernie Gehr of SUNY New Paltz; Gehr has taught in the summer sessions here for the past two years and will do so again this coming summer.

Barn Rushes directed by Lawrence Gottheim, Associate Professor of Cinema, SUNY Binghamton.

Nissan Ariana Window and *Adjacent Perspectives*, directed by Ken Jacobs, Associate Professor of Cinema, SUNY Binghamton.

8:00 Premiere of portions of *Don't Expect Too Much*, directed by Nicholas Ray, Visiting Professor of Cinema, SUNY Binghamton. The film, previously tentatively titled, *Gun Under My Pillow*, was made here, uses students as crew and actors, and employs a unique film process.

Sunday, April 30

10:00 Seminar on the commercial film with Lawrence Alloway of SUNY Stony Brook.

10:45 Critical overview of films shown at the Symposium.

11:30 Open discussion of film in the university in general.